

Testimony of Rebiya Kadeer  
President  
International Uyghur Human Rights and Democracy Foundation

At the Oversight Hearing entitled “Human Rights in China: Improving or Deteriorating Conditions?” U.S. House of Representatives Committee on International Relations’ Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights and International Operations,

Wednesday, April 19, 2006  
Room 2172 of the Rayburn House  
Office Building

Honorable Chairmen HENRY J. HYDE and Christopher H. Smith, ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to express my deepest gratitude for this opportunity to testify here today. I have testified and delivered statements to various Congressional bodies in the 13 months since my release from 6 years in a Chinese prison, and I am truly moved by the American government’s continuing concern for the suffering of the Uyghur people.

As someone who grew up and lived under Chinese rule, the fact I can sit here today and tell America’s leaders what is happening to my people, is the cause of deep amazement for me. And be assured also, it is the cause of deep pride for anyone – anywhere in the world – who loves democracy and human rights.

And needless to say – I’m sure you saw the reports the day after I last spoke here – the Chinese government hates me coming here!

If I may, I would like to briefly describe my own family’s situation in East Turkistan before moving on to give an outline of the overall human rights situation there.

As most of you may be aware, my family continues to be harassed by the Chinese police – in particular my son. I am convinced that the Chinese authorities are punishing me by punishing him, trying to stop me from participating in activities such as this hearing here today.

Most worryingly of all, they have advised him to get a lawyer. This means, the Chinese authorities are going to formally charge my son with a crime – probably based on false allegations of financial irregularities surrounding my businesses in East Turkistan.

This is extremely bad news: Chinese courts have a conviction rate of over 99%! The less-than-1% chance his case will be dismissed is not helped the fact that I, Rebiya Kadeer, am his mother.

These are the tactics used by the Chinese government. I have a long, long list of examples of my son, my friends and other members of my family being harassed by the Chinese authorities in the short 13 months since my release, punishing them for what I say here in America.

The tactics I use, are to make the most of living in a free democracy – coming here to speak to you today, for example – and simply telling the truth about what is happening to my family and my people. And I have faith in the power of democracy and truth.

And so on to the general human rights situation in East Turkistan.

I do not want to take up your valuable time, honorable members, by repeating testimony and statements that I and others have already given to you and to other Congressional bodies on the human rights situation in East Turkistan. You have all proven that you have a mastery of the human rights situation in all of the PRC, as well as in East Turkistan.

All of my previous statements and testimonies outlining the Chinese government's efforts to first undermine and denigrate the Uyghur's ancient culture, to marginalize the Uyghurs in the own land, and to brutally suppress all forms of opposition or protest, are all available on the record.

I am sorry to say – and I'm sure you will be sorry to hear – that the human rights situation facing Uyghurs has not improved in any way since those statements were made, and in many respects, the situation continues to deteriorate.

And so rather than repeat what has been stated before, if I may, today I would like to take this opportunity to present updated information, supporting previous statements on the state of Uyghurs' human rights.

However, much of this information was presented in similar form yesterday to the Caucus, and so inevitably, there is going to be some repetition after all – my apologies to anyone who attended the hearing yesterday.

The first issue I wish to bring to your attention is the Chinese government's family planning policies. A senior official – the Mayor of Urumchi – declared in mid-February this year that East Turkistan's rural areas would be the "focus" of future "family planning work".

Generally speaking, East Turkistan's rural population is almost exclusively Uyghur, while the urban population is predominantly Chinese. This tightening of the family planning regulations will therefore fall overwhelmingly on the Uyghur people.

The official justification for this is that reducing the number of births in rural areas – by whatever means – will reduce poverty, and will also reduce the need for more resources to be spent on education, health and the like.

I testified to the Congressional-Executive Commission on China solely on the topic of family planning regulations in East Turkistan, and my statement remains on the record so thankfully, I can today spare you from hearing the horrific accounts of forced, late-term abortions; of forced sterilizations; and the extreme physical and psychological traumas inflicted on women as a result of these procedures.

The sheer injustice of making Uyghurs the “focus” of family planning work in East Turkistan is highlighted by the next concern I want to bring to your attention.

And that is, the rapid growth in East Turkistan’s population, which is not, I hasten to add, because of the high number of births, but because of the high number of people encouraged to move to East Turkistan from China.

Early last week, the Chinese government announced that East Turkistan’s population had exceeded 20 million people, having grown 9% over the past five years – which is one of the highest rates in the whole of the PRC.

I’ll quickly return to my first point: the Uyghurs are to be the “focus” of tightening family planning policies; but at the same time, the overall population is rising fast because the government is encouraging so many Chinese migrants to settle in East Turkistan.

Some people might say that this is an over-simplification. But if you are a Uyghur, this is very simple. Uyghurs see their unborn children being butchered so they can “shake off poverty”, and then watch as impoverished Chinese migrants are encouraged to move to East Turkistan to make better lives for themselves.

Don’t forget either, we cannot protest against this kind of injustice. If Uyghurs protest against Chinese government policies, especially ones as sensitive as family planning regulations, they would be in serious trouble, as I’m sure you can imagine.

And the question of ever-greater numbers of people moving to East Turkistan is a crucial one for the Uyghur people. When a Uyghur hears that East Turkistan’s population is rising, they know: “that’s more marginalization for the Uyghurs; that’s less opportunity – social and economic – for the Uyghurs; that’s less time for the Uyghur people to survive in East Turkistan.”

I should say at this point, Uyghurs have nothing against the Chinese settlers personally: they are only trying to make a living, and they’re often happy to leave difficult lives behind in China and try to make a new life for themselves in East Turkistan.

They are not told of the effects on Uyghurs of their moving to East Turkistan – and few Uyghurs would dare to explain – and so they cannot be – and are not – blamed for Uyghurs’ problems.

A growing concern related to the number of people moving into East Turkistan – but not necessarily an obvious human rights concern – is whether the environment will be able to sustain these growing numbers of people. Water is becoming increasingly scarce, and rapid desertification – a result of Chinese industry, agriculture and urbanization exhausting the land and water – is making parts of East Turkistan uninhabitable.

And then finally, another serious issue, which has again become prominent since I last testified before you in December, is the question of Uyghurs being sent back to the PRC from second

countries – even people who have been granted refugee status by UNHCR – where they then face torture and even execution.

Two ongoing cases have thrown this problem into sharp focus.

In one case, we heard that a man, Ismail Samed, who was sent back to the PRC from Pakistan in 2003, was sentenced to death in October last year.

He was in Pakistan having fled East Turkistan, and was deported to face accusations of planning terrorist attacks against Chinese targets in East Turkistan.

The only evidence against him is the testimony of other people, Uyghurs, who in all probability were tortured into giving those testimonies – two of the people whose testimonies were used to sentence Mr Samed to death, were themselves executed in 1999.

Ismail Samed may already have been executed, if his appeal has been heard. We don't know for certain yet, but we will certainly pass on further information when it becomes available.

The other case is that of Huseyin Celil, a Uyghur who has been held in incommunicado detention in Tashkent, Uzbekistan since March 26, and who could be sent back to the PRC at any moment. Mr Celil will almost certainly be executed if he is sent back, having been sentenced to death in absentia on charges relating to establishing a Uyghur political party in East Turkistan.

Mr Celil is now a Canadian citizen, and we understand that the Canadian government is working hard to secure his release in Tashkent, and his return to Canada.

Both of these cases – Mr Samed and Mr Celil – illustrate the enormous power China has over neighboring countries in the region. Despite having obviously inadequate evidence against these men – and many others in the past – these neighboring states hand these men over to the Chinese government, apparently unconcerned that they are likely to be tortured and even executed.

Even being a naturalized Canadian citizen in the case of Mr Celil is no guarantee of protection from the Uzbeki authorities when the Chinese government attempts to interfere.

Other countries known to have sent Uyghur refugees back to the Chinese authorities where they face torture and even execution, including Uzbekistan and Pakistan, are Nepal, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

And it is not just neighboring countries who are intimidated into following Beijing's wishes to the letter with regard to Uyghurs: I myself was recently refused a visa to attend the World Movement for Democracy in Istanbul, Turkey, organized by the National Endowment for Democracy.

There was a clear message from the Turkish government that they feared if they issued me with a visa, there would be some form of retaliation from the Chinese government.

I hope the irony is not lost: I was refused a visa, to a democratic country, to attend a conference about democracy, on the basis of arbitrary threats by China.

Honorable members of the Caucus, if I may be so bold, I sincerely believe that the question of China's undue influence over its neighbors in ensuring the extradition of political opponents, is an area where the United States of America could do a great deal to help – a great deal to persuade China's neighbors to offer better protection to Uyghur refugees within their borders.

Since 9/11, the Chinese government has cynically manipulated any Uyghur opposition to Chinese policies and practice, to present it as a “terrorist threat”; that is, the Chinese government is taking the US-led “war on terror” to further its own national and political agendas.

I and the Uyghur people all over the world are convinced that if the US Congress could pass a Uyghur Policy Act – or some such – which would allow for the appointment of a Special Coordinator for Uyghur Issues, there would be an immediate and significant improvement in the human rights situation faced by the Uyghur people.

I have already taken up a great deal of your valuable time, so let me conclude by saying once again thank you for this important opportunity to place these concerns and suggestions before the government of the United States of America – a great opportunity indeed on the day before the Chinese President arrives in Washington, DC.

Thank you so much.